

How, When, and Why to Use a Castor Oil Pack

Relieve pain, decrease inflammation, improve circulation, boost immunity, and loosen scar tissue

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What are castor oil packs?

Castor oil packs are a super simple, old-timey naturopathic treatment that's perfect for your modern day maladies. They have some history behind them, but they're certainly not out of date! And don't let their simplicity fool you either, they really do work!

Castor oil packs consist of castor oil and a piece of absorbent cloth, like cotton flannel, applied topically to your abdomen, sore muscles, scar tissue, or more! If you want some extra benefit, have a heating pad or hot water bottle handy to help move the castor oil into your tissues more efficiently.

Please note: you never, ever ingest the castor oil. Most people who have heard about castor oil have only used it internally (usually to stimulate labor) and it is un-com-for-ta-ble. Castor oil used externally, as with the castor oil packs, is actually quite pleasant!

We'll cover this in more detail later on, but here's a quick overview: you saturate the cloth with oil, apply it to the area you'd like to treat, then apply a heat source like a heating pad. The oil will absorb into your skin to support the underlying tissue with anti-inflammatory effects, better circulation, and increased immune function.

It's a funny thing -- castor oil has been studied, but no one quite knows what makes it so magical. We just know that it works! If you want more information on what castor oil is and it's benefits, [check out this well-researched article](#).

So let's go through those required items and I'll give you my favorites!

Castor oil:

You want to make sure you purchase hexane-free castor oil and that it's expeller pressed or cold-pressed. You may have seen castor oil at a drug store -- don't buy this stuff, or at least read the label. It's almost always processed with hexane, which is an inflammatory chemical. This is the opposite effect that we want to have! I really like [NOW brand](#), [Home Health](#), or [Heritage](#). An 8oz bottle would be a great amount to start with! BONUS: it's very cheap so it'll cost you about \$5 for an 8oz bottle.

Cloth:

Your cloth can be any rag like an old t-shirt, flannel pajamas, or dust rag (cleaned, of course!). Ideally it will be a little more absorbent (read: fuzzy!) so it holds more oil. The cloth should be a minimum of 24x24 in size and up to 30x30 works, too. The idea is that you'll be able to fold the cloth several times so you'll have a concentrated amount of the super-duper therapeutic oil over the area you're working on. More layers = more oil = more soothing/anti-inflammatory goodness. When using your pack, you want to open it up to a maximum of 2 layers thick, and it's better to shoot for 4 -8 layers. [Here's a link to one of my favorites](#). You can also buy some fun cotton flannel and make one yourself!

Pro-Tip #1: You don't have to wash the cloth after every use, hooray! As long as the oil isn't rancid, you're good to use the pack for several months. Rancid castor oil has an off smell to it. Be sure to smell your fresh castor oil so you know when the oil goes rancid and you can wash the cloth and/or replace your supply.

Pro-Tip #2: Store your oil-soaked cloth in a ziploc. You can store it at room temperature or in the fridge. If it's at room temperature, treat it as you would oil by keeping it in a cool, dark place. If you store it in the fridge, you'll probably want to heat up the pack before using it so it's not super chilly on your skin! I like to use a glass pyrex baking dish and put the pack in the oven for a few minutes to warm it. Don't use the microwave as this can damage the castor oil.



Heating pad/hot water bottle:

This will add to the soothing effects of the castor oil. The heat is really relaxing and it will help to drive the castor oil deeper into your tissues for more healing. I like [this small, affordable heating pad](#) from Amazon, and here's [hot water bottle](#), too.

Pro-Tip #1: I would recommend a heating pad over a hot water bottle. Hot water bottles only stay hot for 20-25 minutes, which is potentially too short a time for the castor oil pack, depending on where you're using it.

Pro-Tip #2: I like to use a small compostable bag between the castor oil pack and the heating pad. It helps to keep your heating pad clean and then you can just compost it after you're done. I'm not a big fan of plastic bags, because when heated, plastic leaches gross chemicals into whatever is surrounding it, turning your anti-inflammatory castor oil pack into something not as therapeutic.

Continue to my answers to common questions...

What conditions do castor oil packs treat?

Castor oil packs aid in elimination and detoxification processes in the body. They also have pain-relieving and anti-inflammatory properties due to castor oil's ability to modulate inflammatory chemicals. Heat added to the pack via a heating pad or hot water bottle increases circulation, helping the body flush out inflammation and irritants as well.

Castor oil packs are helpful in a wide variety of conditions, such as:

- uterine fibroids
- PMS
- menstrual cramps
- ovarian cysts
- fibrocystic breasts
- headaches
- liver and gallbladder issues
- abdominal pain
- constipation
- diarrhea
- intestinal disorders
- nighttime urinary frequency
- inflamed joints/swelling
- painful muscles

Castor oil is a great choice to loosen and reduce scar tissue from surgeries or injuries, which can impair the function of other structures surrounding it.

Symptoms may increase for a short period of time as the body begins the detoxification process. If this occurs, decrease the amount of time and frequency with which you use the pack.

How often should I use my castor oil pack?

You can use your castor oil pack several times a week. I usually recommend between 2 - 5 times a week for my patients, but if you're getting relief with it, you're more than welcome to use it every day, sometimes multiple times per day for more acute conditions. It's a gentle therapy that's hard to overdo.

How long does it take?

Well, that depends on what you want to treat!

The general rule is that the more superficial the tissue you want to treat, the less time it takes. For example, treating achy joints in your fingers will take less time treating your low back with tons of muscles and connective tissue to work through.

I recommend 45 - 60 minute applications for abdominal and back treatments and 20 - 25 minutes for joints, arms, legs (longer for big muscles like the gluts and hamstrings), hands, feet, chest, and face.

Let's look at how to apply your castor oil/castor oil pack

#1 The full pack experience (preferred)

Doing the whole shebang with the pack and the heating element and the 45 - 60 minute time period is really is worth it. Part of the castor oil therapy is to help you slow down and make time for yourself. Grab a book, plop yourself in front of the TV, and relax for 45 minutes with the soothing oil and heat!

Pro-tip #1: If you're short on time on a particular day, don't skip the pack. It will still help if you're only able to do it for 20 minutes! And sometimes this is a more realistic goal than the full hour experience.

Pro-tip #2: Depending on where you've placed your castor oil pack, it's possible to cling wrap it to yourself so you can walk around and be active while the oil is working. I would not recommend using a heating element in this scenario as heat and plastic don't mix. This isn't as ideal as the full pack experience, but if it helps you do the pack more often, go for it. Just be careful of the oil leaking all over.

#2 Rubbing it in (in a pinch or for more superficial areas)

If you're rushed for time, instead of doing the full pack you can choose to rub it into the area you'd like to treat. This method can be pretty effective for superficial joints, like fingers, toes, elbows, and the front of the knee. However, without the extra layers of cloth to provide more oil to the area and the heating element, the oil won't sink as deeply into the tissues. Try it out and see if you like it! I've had some patients notice a difference just from rubbing castor oil over the affected area.

Pro-tip #1: Castor oil is very thick, so you have to give it time to soak into your skin. Having an old shirt handy that you don't mind getting oil on is really helpful.

Pro-tip #2: Go to bed with the castor oil rubbed into your joints, abdomen, etc. This way the oil will stay on your skin overnight. It's a great method if you don't have time for a full pack. Again, just make sure you have an old shirt and probably a towel as a barrier between the castor oil and your sheets. Some areas of the body are easier to make this work (like the abdomen) than others.

Pro-tip #3: If you're working on deep scar tissue, rubbing it in can help, but won't be nearly as effective as the castor oil pack.

How to Use a Castor Oil Pack:

SUPPLIES

- [Flannel cloth](#) (cotton, wool, or old t-shirt, washed and dried 24" x 24" to 40" x 48")
- 1-2 old bath towels (to soak up extra oil)
- [Hot water bottle](#), [hot gel pack](#), or [heating pad with a protective cover](#)
- [Castor oil, hexane free](#)
- Glass dish (pyrex or similar dish large enough to warm flannel castor oil pack prior to use if you've stored it in the fridge; remember, don't reheat in the microwave!)
- Large Ziploc bag (to store the castor oil saturated cloth)
- Optional: plastic wrap (clear plastic kitchen cling wrap)



DIRECTIONS

- Soak the flannel cloth in castor oil and loosely wring out the excess oil. There will be excess oil for the first few applications, after that the castor oil pack should not drip excess oil.
- Fold the flannel cloth so it is 2-4 layers thick and covers the affected area.
- Put the castor oil pack in a heat-safe glass dish and place in the oven to heat to a comfortable temperature, if you've stored your pack in the fridge.
- Lay down in a comfortable position, or prop yourself up on a few pillows. Place the old towel under you to avoid getting oil stains on the underlying fabric.

Continued on the next page...

- Place castor oil pack over affected area.
- Optional step: wrap the old towel or another one around the affected area to keep the pack in place.
- Place a compostable bag over the castor oil pack to protect your heating element from the oil.
- Place a hot water bottle, hot gel pack, or protected heating pad over the castor oil pack.
- Warm yourself in a warm blanket, as you'll be stationary for awhile.
- Leave the castor oil pack on for 45-60 minutes (may have to reheat hot water bottle or gel pack). It is still helpful to do if you only have 20-30 minutes!
- When you are done, store the pack in a large Ziploc bag, either at room temperature in a cool, dark place or in the fridge. The pack can be used repeatedly without washing.
- The next time you use the pack, add just a few teaspoons of oil if the cloth seems dry to refresh it. Sometimes you won't need to add anymore oil at all!
- After several months wash the cloth to reuse.

Discover more online at <http://www.drlizcarter.com>



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I'm here to help you go from just surviving to fully thriving. Achieve all you want out of life through better health and a deeper understanding of yourself and others. Here, take my hand. Let's get started.